

WHAT HAS LIBERALISM DONE FOR LABOUR ?

The truth is that Liberals have done so much for Labour that it is very difficult briefly to answer the question. Here are some **FACTS** of a general nature that will give you some idea of **what the working classes owe to Liberalism.**

1. **LIBERALS GAVE THE WORKERS THE VOTE.** There have been three Reform Acts (1832, 1867, and 1884), and all were the work of, and were carried by, Liberals. Now, **the Vote is the great instrument of all Reform, and it cannot be denied that it was the Liberals who, believing in the right of the workers to have it, put it into their hands.** That really covers everything. The great period of Reforms for the benefit of the working classes began only after the Reform Act of 1832.

2. **LIBERALS HAVE ORIGINATED ALL THE GREAT REFORMS WHICH HAVE DIRECTLY BENEFITED THE WORKING CLASSES.** This is true even when (as in the Repeal of the Corn Laws and Free Education) the measures were finally brought in by the Tories. In both these cases the Reform was the result of long years of agitation by Liberals, and by **Liberals only, and in both it was only carried by Liberals votes.**

3. **THE FIRST STARTING-POINTS IN WORKING-CLASS LEGISLATION HAVE BEEN LIBERAL MEASURES.** In all the more important branches of working-class legislation the honour of having taken the first step and passed the first measure belongs to the Liberals. **It was the Liberals who passed the Factory Act of 1833,** and by so doing gave the greatest impetus to the movement for humanizing the conditions of Factory Labour. **It was the Liberals who passed the Education Act of 1870,** which established a National system of Elementary Education. **It was the Liberals who passed the Trade Union Act of 1871,** the great Charter of Trade Unionism. **It was the Liberals who passed the Employers' Liability Act of 1880,** which partially abolished the doctrine of "common employment," the great barrier to Workmen's Compensation.

The all-important thing to note and to realize is that in every case these measures were either the first of their kind or the first that really counted.

They have consequently formed the **foundation for all later legislation** on the same subjects. **The great thing in politics is to get principles recognized and embodied in laws.** In the cases given above (and they are only samples) **that is the service that Liberalism has rendered to Labour.**

4. **LIBERALS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN SPECIALLY IDENTIFIED WITH MEASURES THAT HAVE LIGHTENED THE BURDENS OF LIFE TO THE WORKERS.** The Liberal movement for the repeal of the Corn Laws ended in the triumph of Free Trade, which, more than any other single measure, has been the cause of Working-Class Prosperity. But the step gained in 1846 was only the first of a **long series of reductions of taxation that Liberals successfully carried out.** Between 1853 and 1866 they remitted taxes amounting to no less than 13 millions. Among the articles on which duties were reduced were tea (from 2/2 to 6d. per lb.), sugar, and coffee, while among those abolished were the duties on Corn, Butter, Cheese, Eggs, and Soap. It is unnecessary to point out **how much this has meant for the well-being of the working classes.** The Liberals, too, abolished the Window Tax (1851), the Tax on Newspapers (1855), and the Paper Duty (1861), thanks to which every working man can have his cheap newspaper. Two other things done by the Liberals that have proved a great boon to the workers may also be mentioned—Penny Postage (1839) and the Post Office Savings Bank (1861).

LIBERALISM AND LABOUR, 1892-1895.

When the Liberals were last in office (from 1892 to 1895) they were in a small majority in the House of Commons and in a large minority in the House of Lords. Though in office they had but little power. Yet **they succeeded in doing excellent service for the workers both in improving the conditions of their labour and in lightening their burdens.**

(1) **The Liberals passed the Railway Servants' Act of 1893,** which empowered the Board of Trade to compel the Railway Companies to bring their servants' hours within reasonable limits.

(2) **The Liberals passed the Factories and Workshops Act of 1895,** by which the lives and limbs of the workers were rendered additionally safe.

(3) **The Liberals carried through Sir William Harcourt's great Democratic Budget of 1894,** which, by placing more of the burden of taxation on those best able to bear it, has increased the annual income of the country by 4 millions.

LIBERALISM AND LABOUR, 1895-1905.

For 10 years (1895-1905) the Liberals were out of power. They were, therefore, unable (so far as carrying Laws is concerned) to do anything for Labour. But during all these years, and in the face of huge majorities against them, **they proved true to the great record of their Party in the service of Labour.** Here are two illustrations (the number might be indefinitely increased) of the attitude of Liberals during these 10 years towards the interests of the workers—both relating to matters of vital importance.

(1) **Liberals and the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1897.** The Liberals proposed many amendments in order to bring the Bill up to the standard of the Liberal Bill of 18 4, and thus make it of real value to the working classes.

(2) **Liberals and the Legal Position of Trade Unions.** In 1903, 1904 and 1905 Bills were brought in to restore to Trade Unions the legal position they enjoyed up to the time of the Taff Vale and other decisions. These Bills were approved by the Trades Union Congress Parliamentary Committee, and, to prove **how entirely the Liberals are with the workers in this demand**, two facts alone need be stated—(1) **Of three Bills, two were introduced by Liberal members, and (2) No Liberal member ever voted against any of the Bills.**

LIBERALISM AND LABOUR, 1906-1912.

Since 1906 a Liberal Government has been in power, with (for the first time in our history) a Labour Member in the Cabinet. Faithful to their creed and traditions, **they have put to their credit a great record of work for the benefit of Labour**—a record unequalled in the same length of time by any previous Government.

LEGISLATION.—The present Liberal Government have passed (1) **THE WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION ACT**, which includes six millions of workers previously denied the right of compensation for accidents at their work, and provides for compensation, wherever practicable, in cases of disease due to employment; (2) **THE TRADE DISPUTES ACT**, replacing the Trade Unions in the legal position they occupied before the Taff Vale and other decisions of the Law Courts; (3) **THE NOTICE OF ACCIDENTS ACT**, for the better prevention of Accidents; (4) **THE FACTORY AND WORKSHOP ACT**, shortening the hours of labour in Laundries; (5) **THE MERCHANT SHIPPING ACT**, securing to seamen increased accommodation and a proper supply of food; (6) **THE COAL MINES REGULATION ACT**, limiting a miner's work below ground to $8\frac{1}{2}$ hours a day; (7) **THE LABOUR EXCHANGES ACT**, to lessen the evils of unemployment; (8) **THE TRADE BOARDS ACT**, attacking the

evils of sweating; (9) **THE SHOP ACT**, providing for a weekly half-holiday, securing regular meal times for Shop-Assistants, and promoting early closing; and (10) **THE COAL MINES ACT**, making thorough-going provision for the health and safety of miners.

In addition, **the Liberal Government has maintained Free Trade; has taken a penny off the Tea Duty and more than halved the Sugar Tax; and has passed—the OLD AGE PENSIONS Act**, giving pensions to more than 900,000 old folk of 70 and over; (2) **the People's Budget**, which puts the **Biggest Burden of Taxation on the broadest back**, taxes **Land Values**, and provides money for the **Navy, Old Age Pensions, and National Development**; and (3) **the NATIONAL INSURANCE ACT**, which sets up a system of Insurance; (a) by which no less than some 14,000,000 workers will to a large extent be protected against the loss, expense, and anxiety caused by **SICKNESS and BREAKDOWN**, and (b) by which 2,400,000 workers in certain industries will be insured against **UNEMPLOYMENT**.

ADMINISTRATION.—But it is not only by Legislation that the Liberal Government have rendered incalculable service to the workers. They have also most vigorously used their Administrative powers for their benefit. We can only indicate one or two of the ways in which they have done this. They enforce more strictly the Law in regard to Railwaymen's Hours. They have very greatly increased the number of Factory Inspectors. They have further recognised Trade Unions. They have considerably improved the conditions of employment of Government workers. They have greatly increased the wages of Postal Servants.

This, then, in outline, is the answer to the question, "What has Liberalism done for Labour?" Many reforms closely affecting the lives of the workers (such as Temperance, Land and Miners' questions) that the Liberals have fought for and carried through have not even been mentioned, and a long list of Liberal measures of all kinds in the interests of the workers could be given. **But the great, essential facts of the Liberal Record in regard to Labour have been stated, and they form a sufficient answer to the question. With all these facts in mind you must agree that it is hardly too much to say that the measure of political and industrial freedom, and of social well-being and prosperity that the working classes enjoy to-day is due, directly or indirectly, to the Liberals.**